

Thomas Stewart House (Shelter Inn/Canal Inn)
Shelton Avenue
Alexandria
Huntingdon County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5408

HABS
PA,
31-ALEX,
26-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

THOMAS STEWART HOUSE
(Shelter Inn/Canal Inn)

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26

Location: The Thomas Stewart House is located west of the intersection of Hartslog Street and Shelton Avenue, Alexandria, Porter Township, Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: Gladys and Elmer Huggler.

Present Use: Single-family residence.

Significance: This residence facing the canal route was owned by Robert Lytle and for many years served as the Shelter Inn, a tavern that catered to canal--and perhaps later, railroad--travelers. It is one of the oldest buildings in town, notable for its placement away from Main Street and the turnpike.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: ca. 1804. Tax records show that in 1804 the Stewarts were taxed for a house. Also, a letter written by Jane Woolverton when the inn was sold gives its history and the 1804 construction date (Interview with Jean Harshbarger). In 1867 deeds first mention the building as having been "formerly a hotel."
2. Original and subsequent owners: The lot is located on a tract east of the corner of Hartslog Street and Shelton Avenue, extending westward to the east end of what was formerly a 12' alley, thence south along said strip to the right-of-way of the Petersburg Branch of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company to the west side of Hartslog Street.

The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the structure stands. Reference is to the Recorder of Deeds Office of the County of Huntingdon, Pennsylvania.

1816 Deed March 23, 1816, recorded in Volume P1, Page 46.

Elizabeth Gemmill

TO

Thomas and Ann Stewart (daughter).

1826 Deed April 16, 1826, recorded in Volume U1, Page 282.

Thomas Stewart

TO

Robert Lytle.

1867 Deed 1867, recorded in Volume D3, Page 136.

Robert Lytle (Orphan's Court)
TO
Dr. Tobias Harnish.

1897 Will recorded in Will Book 15, Page 84.
Tobias Harnish (died May 13, 1897)
TO
Lettie Harnish.

1901 Deed July 25, 1901, recorded in Volume R4, Page 456.
Letitia Harnish
TO
William Woolverton.

1921 Deed February 14, 1921, recorded in Volume S6, Page 355.
Edith Beaver Woolverton, et al.
TO
William H. Baker.

1932 Deed December 28, 1932, recorded in Volume L7, Page 315.
Blanche Putt
TO
William and Celia M. Baker.

1964 Deed September 14, 1964, recorded in Volume 62, Page 365.
Frances P. Baker (executor for William S. Baker)
TO
Donald B. English.

1971 Deed August 2, 1971, recorded in Volume 98, Page 51.
Donald B. English
TO
Gladys and Elmer Huggler.

3. Original plans and construction: No original plans or drawings have been located. The structure was designed to front south, and did when the canal and railroad came through Alexandria. Originally the house was a three-bay side-hall plan with the front door on the southwest corner. The two westernmost bays were added shortly after the building was constructed, about 1804. The cellar is contained under the east section of the building. The wall between the hall and the west rooms--historically an exterior wall--is about 1' thick. This wall has reportedly been removed at the attic level; perhaps carried out at the time of the addition.

Originally a bank barn and springhouse were part of the complex.

4. Alterations and Additions: A two-story frame ell has been added to the north,

rear wall corner of the house; this is wrapped with a one-story shed-roofed porch. The entirety of this addition serves to reorient the house to front on to Shelton Avenue, from its original position facing the canal. The front door now occupies a former, central window bay. The original doorway opening is extant on the south side, which now holds a modern, aluminum door.

The interior has been altered dramatically. A bathroom now separates the south and north sections of the hall, creating a small foyer for what is now the front entry on the north side of the structure.

According to the Huntingdon County Historic Sites Survey, the stairs to the second floor have been partially enclosed, and the position of the stairway to the third floor changed. Both may have been open originally. A late-nineteenth-century porch has been removed.

The original wooden window casings on the first floor, south facade, have been replaced with a synthetic material. No shutters remain, but the shutter hardware does.

- B. Historical Context: In 1816 Elizabeth Gemmill, founder of Alexandria, deeded this land to her daughter, Ann, and son-in-law, Thomas, who had apparently been living on it for some time (Harshbarger, 32). She also deeded the tannery lot east of the house, and "the privilege of continuing the conduit for water from the upper spring as it now passes to the tanyard. . ." (Gemmill's deed). The tanyard was passed among several owners until 1826 when the sheriff sold it to Robert Lytle.

Robert Lytle operated a public house, the Shelter Inn, during the canal era, as well as working as a tanner (Africa, 427). It is probable that this building was converted from a house into an inn about 1830 in anticipation of the canal, although no mention of it as such is documented until 1867. Lytle was in the tanning business with Robert Stitt Sr., who lived on Shelton Avenue, while Alexander Stitt lived a block away on Main Street; together Lytle and the younger Stitt advertised for green hides. Lytle later deeded to Alexander Stitt's son, Robert, the tanyard, outbuildings, and springhouse.

Dr. Tobias Harnish, the buildings' owner during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, practiced medicine in Water Street before moving to Alexandria (Africa, 430). His Alexandria residence in the late 1800s was on Main Street, so it is likely that he rented the tavern to a resident innkeeper.

The Shelter Inn was erroneously called the Shelton Inn in 1971, after a misderivation or misspelling of the street name, Shelton Avenue.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Side-gabled, double pile.
2. Condition of the fabric: Good, although there is indication of structural stress.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The house is 45' x 32'; the addition from 12' to 38'.
 2. Foundation: Stone.
 3. Wall construction: Brick laid in Flemish bond with a stringcourse between the cellar and the ground floor.
 4. Structural system, framing: Load-bearing brick.
 5. Porches: A large shed-roofed porch has been added to the north facade, into which is constructed a two-story frame ell.
 6. Chimneys: One interior brick chimney remains on the east gable end; in addition to which there is a newer brick exterior chimney.
 7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The original, single front door centered on the south facade is a synthetic replacement, as is the door on the north facade. The opening, however, features flanking three-light sidelights.
 - b. Windows: Six-over-six-light double-hung sash.
 8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Side-gable with asbestos shingles.
 - b. Cornice: Wood boxed cornice.
- C. Description of Interior:
1. Floor plans:
 - a. Cellar: Some bark is visible on the log walls of the cellar.
 - b. First floor: The southeast corner (family room) space and northeast kitchen each contain a fireplace on the east gable wall; an open doorway connects them. Another doorway on the kitchen's west wall leads into the present front hall, which is divided from the rest of the original hall by a modern bathroom. The stairway leads up the west wall to the second floor.

The southwest corner living room and southeast corner dining room also contain a fireplace on their west walls, and open into each other and the extremities of the hall space.
 2. Stairways: The stairs to the second floor have been partially enclosed, and the

position of the stairway to the third floor has been reoriented, according to the current owner. Both may have originally been open.

3. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster.
 4. Doorways and doors: The west section of the second floor is 8" higher than this level of the original, east end.
 5. Decorative features: The original chair rails have been removed. One original fireplace mantel remains in a bedroom.
- D. Site: The old Shelter Inn building is located on a large lot on the north edge of Alexandria's grid plan. While there are residences across Shelton Avenue to the north, they are spaced farther apart than those on Main Street. The Presbyterian Church is on the northeast corner of Hartslog Street and Shelton Avenue. South of the house is a steep embankment that once led to the canal, and later to the railroad bed. The current fire station lies below the embankment on the other side of what is now the filled-in canal bed. Landscaping, enclosures: A hedge bounds the property on the east flank.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Old views (in Hartslog Heritage, 32, 74 and 78).

- B. Primary and unpublished sources:

Porter Township tax records, 1819 to 1859, Huntingdon County Historical Society.

Alexandria Borough tax records, 1859 to 1873, Huntingdon County Historical Society and Huntingdon County Courthouse.

Huntingdon County Deed Books and Probate Records, Huntingdon County Courthouse, Huntingdon, Pennsylvania.

Huntingdon County Tax Map -- Alexandria, 01-01-09.

Huntingdon County Historical Society survey sheets.

- C. Secondary and published sources:

Africa, J. Simpson. History of Huntingdon and Blair Counties, Pennsylvania. Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1883.

Harshbarger, Jean P., Nancy R. Taylor, Sara H. Zabriskie, and F.R. Zabriskie. Hartslog Heritage. State College, Pennsylvania: K-B Offset Printing, Inc., 1975.

Stewart, Robert. Colonel George Stuart and His Wife Margaret Harris: Their Ancestors and Descendants. No publisher given, 1907.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was conducted by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record in cooperation with the America's Industrial Heritage Project under the directorship of Randy Cooley; AIHP is an undertaking of the National Park Service, based in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania. Recorded under the direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief of HABS/HAER, the project was completed during summer 1988 at the HABS field office in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Project leader was Alison K. Hoagland, senior HABS historian; field supervisor was Dorothy Burlingame, University of Vermont; project historian, Karen Genskow, Sangamon State University. Large-format photography is by David Ames. Editing of the final report was done by Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian.

This report was completed as part of a larger project documenting two canal towns--Saltsburg, on the Western Division of the Pennsylvania Mainline Canal, and Alexandria, on the Juniata Division--flanking the Allegheny Divide. Twenty-one reports on other buildings in Alexandria, an overview history of Alexandria (HABS No. PA-5407), and of canal town development in Pennsylvania (HABS No. PA-5666) are part of the HABS/HAER collection. Twenty-two reports on buildings in Saltsburg (Indiana County) and an overview history of Saltsburg (HABS No. PA-5438) are also available. Results of the project were published as Two Historic Pennsylvania Canal Towns: Alexandria and Saltsburg, Sara Amy Leach, editor (Washington, DC: Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, National Park Service, March 1989).